

BACKGROUND

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UNITED STATES, RUSSIA UNITE AGAINST SPREAD OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS

State's Joseph says terrorists with such weapons "greatest threat of our time"

Washington – The United States and Russia are joining forces to lead a new global coalition to detect and defeat the most serious national security threat facing the world today: nuclear weapons in the hands of terrorists, says a top U.S. official.

In a July 18 speech sponsored by National Defense University, Robert Joseph, the State Department's under secretary of state for arms control and international security, provided an overview of the Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism - a new effort unveiled by President Bush and Russian President Vladimir Putin in a bilateral meeting in St. Petersburg, Russia, at the 2006 Group of Eight (G8) summit. (See [related article](#).)

In the post-9/11 world, Joseph said, terrorist organizations such as al-Qaida have declared their intent to acquire nuclear weapons; state sponsors of terrorism, such as Iran and North Korea, have continued to pursue covert weapons programs in violation of international nonproliferation regimes; and nonstate entities, such as A.Q. Khan, have worked to sell weapons of mass destruction (WMD) technologies to the highest bidders on the international black market.

The convergence of these factors, he said, along with the technological advances of a globalizing world "makes nuclear terrorism both the most serious international security challenge of our time, and the most urgent."

"To be wrong once is to have lost one of our cities," he said. "We do not have a second chance; we must take steps now to avert that dark future."

In recent years, diplomatic efforts have converged on the threat from numerous directions, Joseph said. Among them:

- Adoption of consensus agreements within the United Nations, such as the Nuclear Terrorism Convention and Security Council Resolution 1540 and Resolution 1373, which require members' to take concrete action to prevent terrorist acquisition of WMD;

- Programs that build security cooperation among militaries and law enforcement agencies to increase interception of illicit shipments of dangerous materials;
- Intelligence-gathering initiatives that monitor terrorist financial transactions and transmissions through the Internet; and
- Installation of detection equipment throughout global shipping networks.

But, Joseph said, "The Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism is the first initiative of its kind, one that takes a comprehensive approach to dealing with all elements of the challenge."

By bringing together these previous partnerships and then building on their success, the initiative aims to "to establish a growing network of partner nations that are committed to taking effective measures to build a layered defense-in-depth that can continuously adapt to the changing nature of the threat." (See [related article](#).)

With the United Nation's International Atomic Energy Agency acting as an observer, the initiative calls on participants to:

- Improve accounting, controls, and protection of nuclear materials and facilities;
- Detect and suppress illicit activities involving weapons materials;
- Respond to the consequences of acts of nuclear terrorism;
- Promote cooperation in the development of new technologies to combat nuclear terrorism;
- Ensure that law enforcement groups take all possible measures to deny safe haven to terrorists seeking to acquire or use nuclear materials; and
- Strengthen participants' national legal frameworks so that, if apprehended, terrorists and other facilitators of nuclear terrorism can be prosecuted effectively and punished.

"In bringing to bear all instruments of national power against this threat," Joseph said, "the initiative will bring diplomats together with first responders, forensic and technical experts, law enforcement officers, the military, and others in the public and private sectors who shape the present and future risks of nuclear terrorism."

The United States and Russia have invited several potential partner nations as well as the IAEA to attend an initial meeting later this year to further develop the initiative and to sign a statement of principles.

"The Global Initiative will not only reinforce our national efforts, but it signals to all participating nations the importance of developing comprehensive approaches to combat the threat of WMD terrorism," Joseph said.

The [full text](#) of Joseph's speech as prepared for delivery and a [fact sheet](#) with additional information on the Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism are available on the State Department Web site.

The [joint statement](#) issued by Bush and Putin, the [transcript](#) of their press availability, and a related [fact sheet](#) are available on the White House Web site.

For more information on U.S. policies, see [Arms Control and Non-Proliferation](#).

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